



**METRO Blue Line Extension
Community Advisory Committee Meeting
August 3, 2015
Blue Line Project Office
5514 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 200
Crystal, MN 55428
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM**

Meeting Summary

CAC Members: Kate Catron, George Selman, Gene Bakke, Steve Schmidt, Chris Berne, Rich Baker, La Shella Sims, Gillian Rosenquist, Carol Vosberg

Agency Staff and Guests: Dan Pfeiffer, Rachel Haase, Sophia Ginis, Juan Rangel, David Davies, Nick Landwer, Jim Toulouse, Emily Carr, Alicia Vap, Janet Kennison, Laura Baenen, Paul Danielson, MarySue Abel, Tori Nill, Snoti Friday, Dan Soler

1. Introductions

Dan Pfeiffer announced that Kate Catron and Chris Berne were selected as co-chairs of the CAC.

The CAC members were asked if they had any comments on the minutes from the previous meeting. No comments or questions were raised.

2. Outreach Update

Dan Pfeiffer presented. Last week there were three open houses: July 27th – Crystal, July 28th – Robbinsdale, and July 29th – Minneapolis. The comment periods for these meetings are still open, and all materials are posted online. Next week there are two more meetings: August 11th – Brooklyn Park and August 12th – Golden Valley. Hennepin County will also be hosting a meeting for the West Broadway reconstruction project at the same time as the Brooklyn Park meeting.

3. Olson Memorial Highway

Nick Landwer presented.

Technical Issue #2: TH 55/Olson Memorial Highway

Nick walked through the proposed design along Olson Memorial Highway (see presentation for images).

Key issues:

- Existing TH 55 is designated as a principal arterial
- The posted speed limit is 40 mph
- Three lanes eastbound and westbound (6 total)
- Reliever route for I-394

- Existing lanes 12-17 feet wide
- Alignment is continuous and straight (promotes higher speeds)
- Pedestrian crossings are in poor condition
- No bicycle facilities

Proposed improved conditions:

- Continue to operate as a principal arterial and reliever
- 3 lanes eastbound and 3 lanes westbound (6 total)
- Design and post 35 mph speed limit
- Provide for pedestrian connections and safety
 - Increase width of pedestrian crosswalk, rebuild curbs/ramps and add tactile strips, make ADA compliant, add deterrents for mid-block crossings and indicators when trains are coming
- Accommodate for two-way (12 foot) cycle track (a bike lane in each direction)
- Reduce lane widths to 11 feet
- Introduce lane shifts to help with speed reduction
- Enhance lighting along corridor

The new crossing between Newton Avenue and Oliver Avenue is not currently planned to be signalized. Gillian Rosenquist commented that she is concerned about safety at that location. Nick Landwer replied that exact safety measures will be worked out with MnDOT during final design.

La Shella Sims asked about safety of crossings for school children and the possibility of including fencing along the tracks. Nick Landwer replied that the crossings will be marked and include flashing lights to alert cars when pedestrians want to cross, which will greatly improve safety compared to today. Fencing has some design challenges (e.g., it can trap people in). Details of the safety measures will be developed during final design. The design team is also exploring making it a signalized intersection, which would be activated by the pedestrian push button.

Rich Baker asked what is considered a wide pedestrian crossing. Nick replied that it is context dependent, but they had heard from the community that the crossings were too wide. The minimum lane width MnDOT would likely accept is 11 feet. With the reduced lane widths, pedestrians could comfortably cross the road in one signal cycle. Rich asked if Nick can provide more detail about the safety measures that will be in place between Newton Avenue and Oliver Avenue. Nick said that as they get into final design they will give a lot of attention to what will be implemented at that location. Rich stated that he likes that pedestrians will be forced to look up the track on the south side, and he thinks they should also be forced to look up the tracks on the north side. Nick replied that the configuration shown has been successful on the Green Line. Paul Danielson added that the configuration of these crossings has been researched extensively, and the main takeaway is that the act of turning your head is what increases safety, regardless if you are looking up track or down track.

Gillian Rosenquist asked if the speed limit will jump from 35 mph to 50 mph at the end of this corridor. Nick Landwer replied that he anticipates that the speed limit will stay the same in the area

beyond this project, but that hasn't been discussed yet. Gillian thinks that may set the expectation that this is still a highway with higher speeds. Nick said that there are a number of examples of trunk highways that drop in speed through more urban/downtown areas and then jump back up again (e.g., 169 through St. Peter). MarySue Abel added that the changes in the landscape (e.g., addition of LRT and shifted lanes) will also contribute to the more developed feeling and help reduce speeds.

La Shella Sims asked how these plans fit in with what the City is proposing to do along this stretch. Nick Landwer replied that they've been coordinating closely with the City, and the City believes they have opportunities for development in this area, which they showed at the open house last week. La Shella said she would prefer not to see housing or dense development in this area but rather keep the green space. La Shella asked how the Blue Line and Green Line Van White stations will be distinguished. Nick said the station names may change as the projects get finalized, and they won't end up with two with the same name.

Recommendations:

- Advance design for 6-lane principal arterial
- Center running LRT
- 10 foot boulevards
- 6 foot sidewalk on south side
- 3 mid-block pedestrian crossings
- Accommodate for 12 foot cycle track and 6 foot sidewalk on north side
- Continue design coordination with MnDOT, Hennepin County, and the City of Minneapolis

Rich Baker asked about where the cycle track would terminate. Nick replied that the current limiting factor is the I-94 bridge, so it is planned to end at Van White.

Technical Issue #3: Olson Memorial Highway Crossing

The bridge over the freight tracks would be reconstructed to allow the LRT tracks to turn and go underneath the westbound bridge into the trench with the freight tracks.

Recommendations:

- Center running LRT on Olson Memorial Highway
- Reconstruct westbound Olson Memorial Highway span
- Eastbound Olson Memorial Highway span remains in place
- Connect to freight rail corridor north of Olson Memorial Highway bridge
- Continue to work with MnDOT, Hennepin County, and the City of Minneapolis on design

Rich Baker asked if the new westbound bridge would have a bike lane. Nick Landwer said it will have a 12 foot multi-use sidewalk.

Chris Berne asked how the 35 mph speed limit affects projected traffic volumes. Nick Landwer said volumes are a function of capacity, and since capacity will be maintained they don't expect a lot of diversion from speed reduction, particularly if the intersections are operating well. Paul Danielson added that traffic modeling is done in the peak period so signals are designed to get people through

when there is the highest potential for congestion. The model looks at other roadways that drivers may divert to and finds the path of least resistance.

Kate Catron asked if foot bridges were an option instead of at-grade pedestrian crossings. Nick Landwer replied that since it's so flat in this area, people likely won't take them, and the City has expressed a desire to not have foot bridges. They work best when there is a grade difference.

4. Bass Lake Road Station

Alicia Vap presented.

Issues to be resolved:

- Bass Lake Road station park-and-ride
 - Community input from May and July open houses: support the addition of a park-and-ride
- Traffic operations at Bass Lake Road
 - Conduct traffic modeling
 - Analyze grade separation at Bass Lake Road

At the open house last week a surface lot was shown for the park-and-ride. 167 spaces could fit, and a passenger drop-off area would be provided. A few commercial businesses would need to be acquired.

Bass Lake Road analysis:

- At-grade LRT crossing
- 167 space park-and-ride
 - 94 trips in AM peak, 87 trips in PM peak
- CSAH 81/Bass Lake Road AM/PM peak hour operations
 - Existing intersection operates with 25-35 seconds of average intersection delay
 - 2040 without LRT and park-and-ride operates with 30-40 seconds of average intersection delay
 - 2040 with LRT and park-and-ride operates with 35-45 seconds of average intersection delay
 - No significant change in intersection delay due to LRT and park-and-ride

Recommendation:

- Station:
 - Advance park-and-ride of 167 spaces
 - Property acquisition and construction costs not included in DEIS cost estimate
- Traffic operations at Bass Lake Road:
 - Acceptable intersection operations in 2040 with LRT
 - At-grade intersection at Bass Lake Road

5. Transmission Line

Jim Toulouse presented. There is an existing Xcel transmission line that runs along the corridor. BPO has held regular meetings with Xcel and received the following feedback:

- Xcel intends to own and maintain a transmission line in this corridor

- Protect Xcel's ability to access and maintain transmission line structures as necessary
- Accommodate Xcel's ability to replace transmission line structures in the future if not replaced at this time

Characteristics of the transmission line:

- 115 kV transmission line on BSNF right-of-way by permit
- Existing transmission line feeds Xcel's Indiana substation at 33rd Avenue N and Indiana Ave N
- Double circuit steel lattice structures (4)
- Single circuit steel lattice structures (35)
- Single circuit wood poles (36)

Potential Xcel transmission line accommodations:

- Remain in current location
- Steel poles east of LRT tracks
- Steel poles west of LRT tracks
- Steel poles between LRT tracks (last choice option)

Other issues:

- Compatibility with freight rail improvements
- Constructability
- Electrical clearances

Next steps:

- Continue regular coordination meetings with Xcel
- Advance improvements necessary for BLRT
- Ensure improvements covered in FEIS
- Ensure improvements are compatible with BNSF freight rail improvements and any necessary ground improvements or structures

Rich Baker asked if Xcel had stated a preference. Jim Toulouse replied that they said that they would like to be away from the tracks but haven't given a specific distance or configuration. Negotiations are ongoing.

George Selman asked if Xcel would share the cost of replacing the poles. Jim Toulouse said they do have a private permit from BNSF, but they haven't reached that point in the discussions.

6. Systems Introduction

Traction Power Sub Stations (TPSS)

- Converts electrical power (AC to DC) to operate trains
- Requires climate controlled environment
- Placement criteria:
 - Located within 500 feet of track preferred
 - Spacing of approximately 5,000 feet between substations preferred to maintain continuous power to trains
 - Requires closer spacing for steeper track grades

- Located at-grade to minimize cost and provide adequate access for maintenance
- Site features:
 - Requires 40 foot by 80 foot footprint
 - TPSS enclosure
 - 10 foot minimum clear zone about TPSS enclosure
 - Maintenance vehicle parking space
 - Requires fencing and access gate
 - Grounded architectural or chain link
 - Includes porous asphalt pavement
 - Electrical safety
 - Stormwater management
 - Maintain moisture content of soil (assists with conductivity)

Signal Bungalows

- Located where there are rail interlockings or junctions
- Contains communications, signal, and switching controls
- Requires climate controlled environment
- Placement criteria:
 - Located near special trackwork
 - Located within line of sight of special trackwork and equipment testing
 - Requires access for maintenance
 - Located at-grade

Gillian Rosenquist asked if they knew where these would be located. Jim Toulouse said they would be located near the interlockings, but spacing of those has not yet been determined. Five are planned along the length of the line.

Rich Baker asked if the signal bungalows and TPSS can be collocated. Jim Toulouse said they can be and some are along the Green Line.

La Shella Sims asked if the electricity needed to operate the trains posed a safety risk. Jim Toulouse said the power that runs the train is very safe. Everything is grounded in case there is stray current. Paul Danielson added that they will follow the national electric code that defines clearance zones. The LRT system is separate from Xcel's lines.

Overhead Contact System (OCS)

- Transmits electric power from TPSS to the light rail vehicle via pantograph (the spring that is up against the wire)
- Divided into sections, one per TPSS
- Pole and assembly details:
 - Two wires: contact wire and messenger wire
 - Brackets
 - Insulator
 - Tensioning weights

Rail Signals

- Interlocking signals
 - Located at LRT interlockings
 - Convey route direction and authority to LRT trains
- Bar signals
 - Integrated into traffic signals
 - Operate as an independent or concurrent phase of the traffic signal

La Shella Sims asked why pedestrian signals say don't walk and then have the clicking noise for the walk phase. Dan Soler replied that that is what's in the federal design guidelines, but there has been a lot of discussion over the years about what is best.

7. Municipal Consent Process Overview and Roadmap

MarySue Abel presented. Since January, the project team has been working with the Cities through the issue resolution teams to resolve issues and work towards the municipal consent process.

This process is governed by Minnesota Statute 473.3994. Local jurisdictions review and approve physical design components of the preliminary design plans.

Physical design components include:

- LRT track location
- Station location and layout
- Roadway features
 - Turn lanes
 - Lane widths
 - Traffic signals
- Sidewalks
- Pedestrian crossings
- Operations and maintenance facility (OMF)
- Freight track location
- Systems elements

Process overview:

- Met Council submits plans to the Cities and County
 - Plans will also be posted on the project website and available to the public
- At least 30 days following the submittal, the Met Council and the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRRA) will hold a joint open house/public hearing
 - Cities will also hold public hearings during this time frame
- The Cities and County have 45 days after the joint Met Council/HCRRRA open house/public hearing to approve the plans

Next steps after municipal consent:

- Station design and public art
- Streetscape design
- Utility relocation design

- Design advancement
 - LRT track features
 - Roadway details
 - OMF features
 - Bridges and tunnels
 - System elements
 - Freight rail features

Schedule of activities:

- CMC recommendation on project scope: November 2015
- Met Council approval of project scope and issuance of municipal consent packages: December 2015
- Met Council and HCRRRA joint public hearing: January 2016
- Individual City public hearings: February/March 2016
- Municipal consent completion: March 2016
- 30% plan completion: Q3 2016
- Publish FEIS/ROD: Q3 2016
- Apply for entry to engineering to the FTA: Q3 2016

Chris Berne asked what happens if we get to March 2016 and one of the Cities doesn't provide its consent. MarySue Abel said the statute lays out the next steps. The City needs to provide their recommendations for what would need to be done to get their consent, and they would enter negotiations. If the changes are minor, the process would be over. If major, the municipal consent process may have to restart.

Chris Berne asked how the delay in schedule of SWLRT would affect this project. MarySue Abel said policymakers will help us determine how to move forward with funding commitments, but at this time the schedule as presented is what we are moving forward with. Dan Soler added that we're in a timed phase (project development) that did not exist for SWLRT due to changes in federal regulation.

Steve Schmidt asked if there could be construction going on for both BLRT and SWLRT at the same time. MarySue Abel said that there could be two years of overlapping construction.

Gillian Rosenquist asked how Cities can give consent without having the FEIS. Golden Valley had a lot of questions on the DEIS and it's important to know the answers to those questions before deciding. MarySue Abel said the design and the environmental process are informing each other. Janet Kennison said that a series of technical reports are being prepared as part of the process that will identify potential mitigation strategies and will be available to the Cities and County by December. MarySue added that the project development phase is focused on getting to the FEIS and ROD. Dan Soler said that the municipal consent process is a Minnesota state statute that was put in place to give local municipalities an opportunity to review the preliminary design plans and provide another round of feedback before final design begins. The environmental process has its own opportunity for input from the Cities and the public. The FEIS is the document that will be used

to establish necessary mitigation measures, not the municipal consent plans. Gillian said the Golden Valley City Council and citizens have a very different take on the municipal consent process. Rich Baker said the council says they have a trump card and can still veto the project. The environmental technical reports should hopefully provide the answers the City needs.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 pm. The next scheduled CAC meeting was September 7, 2015. Due to Labor Day, the meeting has been moved to September 8, 2015.